Keep it Growing Guide

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Contents

School Garden wizard

Getting Your Hands Dirty

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Garden Chores for Garden Maintenance

Garden work does not end after construction and planting. A successful school garden is well-maintained and survives past the first few years. The visual condition of the garden is the most obvious barometer of a school garden's sustainability. Recruiting enough help for steady garden maintenance—-particularly during the summer—may prove a significant factor in achieving sustainability.

Two critical -components of good garden maintenance are

leadership and a good plan.

Within an established system, knowledgeable, well-trained leaders can guide volunteers and accomplish the work that needs to be done.

Creating a Garden Responsibility Plan

The school garden team needs to create a Garden Responsibility plan for keeping the garden watered, weeded, and cared for throughout the calendar year.

The Responsibility Plan might...
- give tasks of weeding and watering to different classrooms on a rotating basis
- put a student garden club in charge of garden care after school
- outline the plan for summer/holiday maintenance schedule

The Responsibility Plan depends on...
- particular situations at each school
- size and type of garden
- number of classrooms actively using the space

Whatever the plan, the school garden team needs to keep apprised of what is working and what is not and remain flexible to the idea of changing plans and implementing procedures in case the garden or team falls short of expectations.

Tip: Each school garden team must address its maintenance needs according to available resources both inside the school and in the larger school community.

Suggestions for Assigning Work

Make a game out of pulling weeds! Be creative about addressing kids and getting them to do garden chores. Kids will happily weed if the task is proposed as a search-and-destroy mission for the "weed of the week". Show students the "weed of the week" and see how many they can find.

Example:
See which team can pull the biggest pile of weeds.

Children often don't know the difference between the weeds and the good plants. Make weeding easier for the kids by showing them pictures or examples of the weeds they are going to pull that day.

Example:
"Today we are going to pull all of the dandelions." You might consider making a photocopy booklet of common weeds for your garden site to which the children can refer. Or, one class can create a "common weeds" flip book for other classes to use.

Assign classrooms to areas of the garden. By getting children involved from the beginning (with planting the seeds or plants), they will feel like they have ownership of the garden. This will depend on what type of garden you have and how many classes are involved.

Example:
Ms. Johnson's class plants the bean teepee area; therefore, they are responsible for pulling weeds, watering, and harvesting that area of the garden and Mr. Jackson's class is responsible for planting and maintaining the herb bed.

Tip: At many sites, each class has their own garden plot within the overall school garden for which they have complete responsibility, and there may be joint "common" areas as well. The maintenance plan in these instances might only need to address common areas and maintenance during holidays and summer months. Create a plan that works for your site, conditions, and users.

In spring, before school is out for the summer, have families sign up to "adopt" the garden for one week during the summer. This way, the responsibility does not fall on one person or family.

Example:
During Week One the Ramirez family is responsible for watering, weeding, and harvesting the garden.

Tip: If possible, have two (2) families assigned for each week, so that the garden will be maintained even if one family is not able to fulfill their obligation. In hot summer months, a week without maintenance, especially water, can be the death of a garden!

Divide classrooms into teams and rotate teams through different garden tasks.

Example:
Rotations might be watering, weeding, harvesting, or cultivating.

School Garden Weekly Garden Maintenance Schedule

Summer Maintenance Coordinator: _____

Daytime phone number: _____

Week of:	Name(s)	Phone Number	Task

Challenges

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Keeping Everyone Involved and Committed

Strong school garden teams continue to seek, cultivate, and include participants from within the school as well as from the broader community.

Schools that are eager to involve the community, especially parents, have the greatest success because they:
- encourage visits by community members
- provide easy access to tools and materials for volunteer use
- build educational or recreational components into the garden experience
- invite community members to contribute wealth and wisdom and to play a role in active gardening

These practices keep the level of involvement and commitment high.

Commitment to Integrate Curricula

Integration of the garden across the teaching curricula over multiple grade levels is essential to success. The school garden is a natural forum for cross-disciplinary connections, enabling fluid learning across the curriculum. Plant-based activities based on a school garden or outdoor habitat support a variety of learning styles and abilities and are always hands-on and engaging, real-life learning endeavors that help kids gain lifelong skills in a natural environment.

One of the key premises of contemporary school gardening advocates is that garden-based lessons...
- help students meet performance standards across disciplines
- appeal to different learning styles
- apply concepts through the contexts of real-world experiences
- provide rich activities and experiences for students of all learning abilities
- are student-centered
- foster positive engagement and responses from students
- provide evidence for educators and administrators that shows a garden supporting the attainment of educational goals

Tip: Vigilant evaluation of a program, both within the school and at the level of a school gardening network, can help document improved student performance and validate the value of gardening and plant-based activities within the educational system.

Individual School Challenges

Each school garden team can face challenges that are unique to the circumstances of its own school community. These issues can relate to social, economic, and political conditions at their school or in their community. Maybe it's maintaining an active, trained school garden team when key team members leave the school, or perhaps it's finding ways to integrate the interest and focus of additional grade levels each year.

We suggest creating a Network Notebook that includes the names of people who can help meet many kinds of challenges, including those that seem only remotely related to the garden's success. It is possible that local politicians, police and firefighter personnel, and community service organizations will be included in the Network Notebook of resources.

Staff Turnover and Team Changes

The biggest challenge to sustainability is likely to be staff turnover. Without commitment and involvement, the team, and ultimately the school garden, will wither and die.

As faculty members and administrators leave the school and are replaced by new staff, maintaining a commitment to the original project goals becomes more difficult. The ability of the team to maintain focus and commitment to its vision is a significant factor in influencing the success and sustainability of the garden.

A large and adequately diverse school garden team...
- keeps ideas fresh
- allows for a comfortable division of labor
- makes the chore of addressing staff turnover simpler as there are more skilled participants available to fill gaps when a team member leaves the school
- makes it easier to recruit new staff members as enthusiastic participants and, later, as new leaders when the majority of the school is behind the gardening effort

Sustaining a School Garden

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Rating the Garden's Success

Establishing a clear, measurable set of goals for rating the school's success on a range of criteria will provide a baseline to which you can measure on the success of the whole program and therefore determine its sustainability.

Take the time to perform an annual self-assessment so that problems can be identified and addressed—it's invaluable for ensuring the garden program's sustainability. It offers the possibility to see programmatic weaknesses as well as strengthens and introduces ideas for improvement that can benefit everyone involved, particularly if a broad spectrum of the school community is involved in the process.

Celebrating the Garden

Use of the garden for school and community programs, ceremonies, and other events is one of the easiest ways to sustain your garden. People in the garden make the garden come to life.

Invite the community to join

Asking the community to join the fun of workdays and planting days, harvest festivals, special programs, and celebrations is worth the effort. The trick is to think of the garden as a place for such events and encourage new audiences as well as regulars to participate each time.

Build a neighborhood network

Invite neighborhood groups to host a meeting or event in the school garden. Welcome visitors as part of a neighborhood garden tour led by students and teachers describing their work and lessons in the garden.

Remember…the more people experience the garden, the more they will think of and care for the garden and therefore, the more successful and sustainable the garden will be. People who attend such events may become engaged and be willing to volunteer in the garden in other capacities.

Networking

Create a "Network Notebook"

The Resource Leader can create a Network Notebook of all of the available resources and contacts who have contributed or who could potentially support the school garden. The Network Notebook might include:
- educators
- schools
- families
- community members
- collaborators
- local businesses

For each entry, the Network Notebook should include:
- name of individual
- organization
- address
- phone number and email
- what this individual and/or organization is willing to provide (i.e., products, money, time)
- notes about related resources
- dates of past contacts and short synopses of what was asked for or pledged (This will help you space calls properly. You don't want to "wear out your welcome" and you should have more than one person making calls.)

Having a Network Notebook allows the team to be self-sufficient because it provides easy access to expertise and resources within the schools' own community.

Tip: The ability to network with other school gardens is a bonus, and is recommended. Find a citywide network of school garden projects and teams in which the school might participate. The degree to which schools function in a community network with other gardening schools can have a big impact on long-term viability of the garden.

Try these online resources to search for local school garden initiatives:

American Community Gardening Association
http://www.communitygarden.org

American Horticulture Society
http://www.ahs.org

Garden Mosaics
http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/gardenmosaics/

Junior Master Gardener Program
http://www.jmgkids.com/

National Gardening Association
http://www.garden.org/

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Ongoing Fundraising

Have you heard the phrase "Nothing succeeds like success"? That is the reason Harvard University's endowment is well over a billion dollars. You can think of endless examples of this phenomenon. People want to be associated with worthy projects that are doing a good job and achieving goals. Everybody gets satisfaction from pointing to a success and saying "I helped this project get underway."

So the basic rules of successful, ongoing fundraising are to: 1) start your school garden with the assistance of others, 2) share news about the project on a regular basis, and 3) give your contributors credit for their help.

There is a fourth important rule: be open to new ideas and change. School gardens should be dynamic, like all social constructs. The school garden team and your contributors will welcome the chance to see the "idea" of the garden evolve and expand to meet newly-formulated needs and fresh resources. Create a positive feedback loop around your school garden and the people and the money will come.

Getting funds to expand the garden
Obtaining funding to expand the garden and its programs is necessary. Tools, materials, expertise, and labor are all required to sustain a garden and its programs, and these items cost money.

The school garden team might enlist community help for fundraising in order to:
   • share ideas for requesting donations of money, goods, and services
   • provide tips on writing grant proposals (or help write them!)
   • gather new ideas through a school garden network

Create a wish list and then identify potential sources for those items. Each item on the list may be obtained by soliciting a donation from a separate source.

For example:
   • A manager of a local hardware store might be willing to provide a discount on regular retail prices or even donate some tools and supplies outright
   • Nurseries and greenhouses may offer free or very inexpensive plant material
   • Master Gardeners or local garden club members may share expertise and labor on planting days

Evaluation

Why Evaluate?

Performing an evaluation serves many purposes:
• It helps school staff members keep abreast of what is and is not working with the school garden project.
• It enables staff to anticipate problems and generate new ideas for improving and sustaining the project.
• It helps teachers and administrators ensure that students are making the educational gains with the garden programs and activities.
• It builds solid evidence for the value of the project and helps convince potential supporters that the garden—both the physical site and the educational activities it supports—deserves their support.

The team may hire a professional evaluator or perform a self-assessment, which is usually a more realistic option for most school garden budgets.

Performing a Self-Assessment

Conducting an evaluation, or self-assessment, is much like assessing student performance. Student assessment actually begins as the teacher writes a lesson plan. In the process, she identifies goals and objectives that will demonstrate whether the students have learned the new content and skills.

You should have already determined your goals through defining measurable outcomes earlier on in the school garden project. Now, it's time to revisit those goals and determine your success in meeting them.

Hiring a Professional Evaluator

Contracting an outside professional evaluator will provide an objective perspective on the School Garden. Frequently an evaluator will have suggestions for ways to coordinate the project so that it is well organized and to make better use of the resources. Invite the evaluator to participate early in the planning process because this helps her or him gain a clear understanding of the project goals, which will inform the outcome.

Often hiring a professional evaluator is not in the budget.
If working with a professional program evaluator is cost-prohibitive, then contact a local college or university to determine if education or social science faculty members (or, in some cases, horticulture, agriculture, or extension faculty) or graduate students may be available to provide some limited help on an unpaid or less expensive basis. They may be able to partner with you to use your site as a research study for one or more of their graduate students, benefiting themselves as well as you.

Books on Evaluation

Borun, M. & Korn, R. (Eds.). (1999). Introduction to Museum Evaluation. Technical Information Service, American Association of Museums: Washington, D. C.

Diamond, J. (1999). Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings. AltaMira Press: Walnut Creek, CA.

Fitz-Gibbon, C., Herman, J., & Lyons-Morris, L. (1987). Evaluator's Handbook. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA.

Fitz-Gibbon, C. & Lyons-Morris, L. (1987). How to Analyze Data. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA.

Fitz-Gibbon, C. & Lyons-Morris, L. (1987). How to Assess Program Implementation. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA.

Fitz-Gibbon, C., Lyons-Morris, L., & Freeman, M. (1987). How to Communicate Evaluation Findings. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA.

Stecher, B. & Davis, W. A. (1987). How to Focus an Evaluation. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA.

Self-Assessment Worksheet

Self-Assessment Worksheet: Revisiting your Goals

Read through each of the following questions and take time to write your responses. You may want to have each teacher who is participating respond to some portions individually, such as the first section addressing learning goals.

Tip: At the conclusion of the evaluation, all of the components can be assembled into an "Annual Report" for the school, which will be of great use in new funding projects.

1. Garden as a learning environment
   a. How did the garden support the larger educational goals and values of the school?
Tip: List the goals and address each one separately. You may find that great progress was made on some, while others were neglected. Evaluating progress against the goals will help determine whether each goal should be kept, modified, or deleted in next year's plan.
   b. What educational activities and lessons did you incorporate into the garden?
   c. What activities did you plan to enable learners to:
   i. use the garden for science and multi-disciplinary learning?
   ii. gain confidence and enthusiasm for learning?
   iii. acquire gardening and environmental stewardship skills?
   iv. achieve other educational goals through active participation in the garden?
   d. How did the garden meet the learning objectives of a particular lesson or unit?
   e. Did some goals take priority over others and how should this influence the design?
   f. How did you meet the needs of students with disabilities or special learning issues?

2. School garden team
   a. Did the team promote active participation by administrators, teachers, students, parents, neighbors, and volunteers?
   b. Did the school motivate and train the entire faculty, teachers from a specific grade level, or only interested teachers to use the garden?
   c. Did every team member get involved, or did most of the work fall to one or two staff members?

3. Garden maintenance needs
   a. What were the special maintenance needs of the garden and how were they met?
   b. Did you have a system in place for assigning garden duties?
   c. Did the school have an appropriate system for maintaining the garden during the summer and the holidays?
   d. If vandalism was a potential challenge, how was it discouraged or minimized?

4. Teacher training
   a. How was teacher training handled with respect to curricular connections as well as gardening basics?
   b. Were training workshops scheduled at convenient times and locations for the majority of the participants?
   c. What topics or content met teachers' needs and interests the best? What additional topics or content are needed?
   d. Did the activities and lessons meet the local, state, and national standards?

5. Student involvement
   a. How was the student body involved with the garden?
   b. What aspects of garden installation and maintenance did the students participate in?
   c. What classes, grade levels or groups of students used the garden on a regular basis after installation?
   d. Were the students engaged in active discovery, problem solving, and questioning?
   e. What events and activities made the garden part of the students' daily lives (such as recess time, story hours, etc.)?

6. Extra-curricular activities
   a. For which extra-curricular and community activities were the garden used?
   b. Were events, programs, or celebrations planned in the garden?
   c. What ceremonies or cultural events were held in the garden?

7. Parents, community, and networking
   a. How did the garden team work with existing in-school networks of parents (PTO/PTA/Local School Council)?
   b. Were opportunities tapped into to use the support and resources offered by parents and parent groups?
   c. Was there a citywide network of school garden projects and teams that the school participated in? If so, how did participation help sustain the garden?
   d. How was the school garden used and supported by the community? What opportunities existed?